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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5287
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING IMMEDIATE 6590
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA IMMEDIATE 9264
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL IMMEDIATE 5120
RUEHGP/AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE IMMEDIATE 5019
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI IMMEDIATE 5941
RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY IMMEDIATE 0859
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 003540

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, CA, EEB, DS
TRANSPORTATION FOR TSA
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SUBJECT: DECEMBER 3: UPDATE ON THAILAND'S AIRPORT AND
AIRLINE SITUATION

REF: BANGKOK 3532 (DECEMBER 2: UPDATE)

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: Anti-government protesters claimed victory and departed Thailand's airports December 3 after the high court dissolved several political parties and the prime minister stepped down December 2. The Airports of Thailand (AOT) reports that Suvarnabhumi, Bangkok's international airport, will reopen by Friday, December 5 although a few Thai Airways flights have begun already. AOT says there appears to be no apparent damage from the week long occupation by anti-government demonstrators. U.S. airline executives also state they are prepared to begin flights on December 5. Before flights to the United States can begin, the U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA) will first conduct a security analysis of Suvarnabhumi. The Embassy continues to explore options for chartering a flight to transport stranded Americans to Singapore or a regional transit point, although this may no longer be necessary given that Suvarnabhumi seems to be going operational sooner than expected. End Summary.

Airport Conditions

¶2. (SBU) Anti-government demonstrators have departed Suvarnabhumi and Don Muang airports. AOT also reports equipment at the two airports, including the control towers, appears to be undamaged and no sensitive equipment at the airports was compromised. Airport staff are beginning to return to work. AOT released statements to the media that the Suvarnabhumi Airport will reopen by December 5, coinciding with King Bhumibol's birthday. One international flight, according to Thai Airways executives, has already left from Suvarnabhumi. Don Muang, primarily a domestic airport, also expects to be functioning by December 5.

¶3. (SBU) TSA representatives are working with the RTG and AOT to arrange a safety analysis of Suvarnabhumi. TSA will conduct an initial walk through of the airport on December 4. TSA expects U.S. air carriers operating from Suvarnabhumi and foreign carriers flying direct to the U.S. to have performed

all required security measures prior to flying.

Airlines Claim They Are Ready to Take-off

¶4. (SBU) A United Airways (UA) executive told the Embassy on December 3 that UA staff inspected equipment at Suvarnabhumi.

Everything appeared to be operational, including baggage systems and computers. The executive said that there were no major security breaches and all UA systems were intact. The executive said one airplane is prepared to land at Suvarnabhumi late December 4 and depart from the airport on December 5. The American Chamber of Commerce has also distributed this flight information to members by email. A Northwest Airlines (NWA) executive also told the Embassy they were prepared to begin service by December 5 and has distributed an informal email listing flight times.

¶5. (SBU) Thai Airways officials informed the Embassy on December 3 that the airline will resume operations out of Suvarnabhumi on December 4, with a limited number of flights (although a few Thai Airways flights have already begun). They expect to be back up to full speed later this week. The officials said Thai Airways would shut down their operations at U-Tapao later this week. Flights for December 4 operating out of Suvarnabhumi are already posted on the Thai Airways website and have been released to the media.

Chartered Flights for Citizens

¶6. (SBU) The Embassy Consular Section, working with Consular Affairs (CA) in Washington, released a statement to American citizens that the Embassy is exploring the

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possibility of organizing a chartered flight. The statement was posted on the Embassy website as well as distributed to wardens, the American Chamber of Commerce, and area hotels. Interested citizens were told to contact the Embassy by phone or email. Depending on the level of interest, the Embassy will consider whether chartering a flight is necessary (although this option looks increasingly unnecessary). The Embassy also is convening a daily internal meeting to discuss the current airport and airline situation.

¶7. (SBU) The Consular Section and other mission sections, including TSA and the Regional Security Office, have made site visits to area airports and venues to determine the most feasible locations for check-in and departure should a chartered flight be arranged. Currently, one potential option is to fly out of Wing Six of Don Muang. Wing Six is the military wing of Don Muang (see reftel) and located in Bangkok. Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) officials met with Embassy staff on December 3 and explained they are willing to allow chartered flights out of Wing Six, provided passengers are prescreened at an offsite location. Equipment to be used at Wing Six, such as stairs and baggage loaders, would have to be rented by the USG.

¶8. (SBU) The most feasible option for prescreening Amcit charter passengers may be to check-in passengers at a hotel. The French Embassy employed a hotel for check-in of their citizens on its chartered flight. An Embassy team also visited the BITEC convention center that has been used as the prescreening area for Thai Airways, Eva Air, and several other airlines, during the occupation of Suvarnabhumi and Don Muang December 3. However, based on an initial inspection by the Embassy, BITEC appears to have serious security deficiencies, including the lack of security measures around buses to take passengers from BITEC to the airport. Thai City Air Terminal (TCAT), which serves as Thai Airways headquarters, can also accommodate check-in for a chartered flight. However, TCAT may be too small.

¶9. (SBU) Embassy officials contacted diplomats at the

British and Australian Embassies, who stated they are no longer considering the option of chartered flights, largely due to the imminent reopening of Suvarnabhumi. The French chartered one flight that departed from Wing Six at Don Muang with 500 passengers on December 3.

¶10. (SBU) Septel will address political developments in Thailand.
JOHN